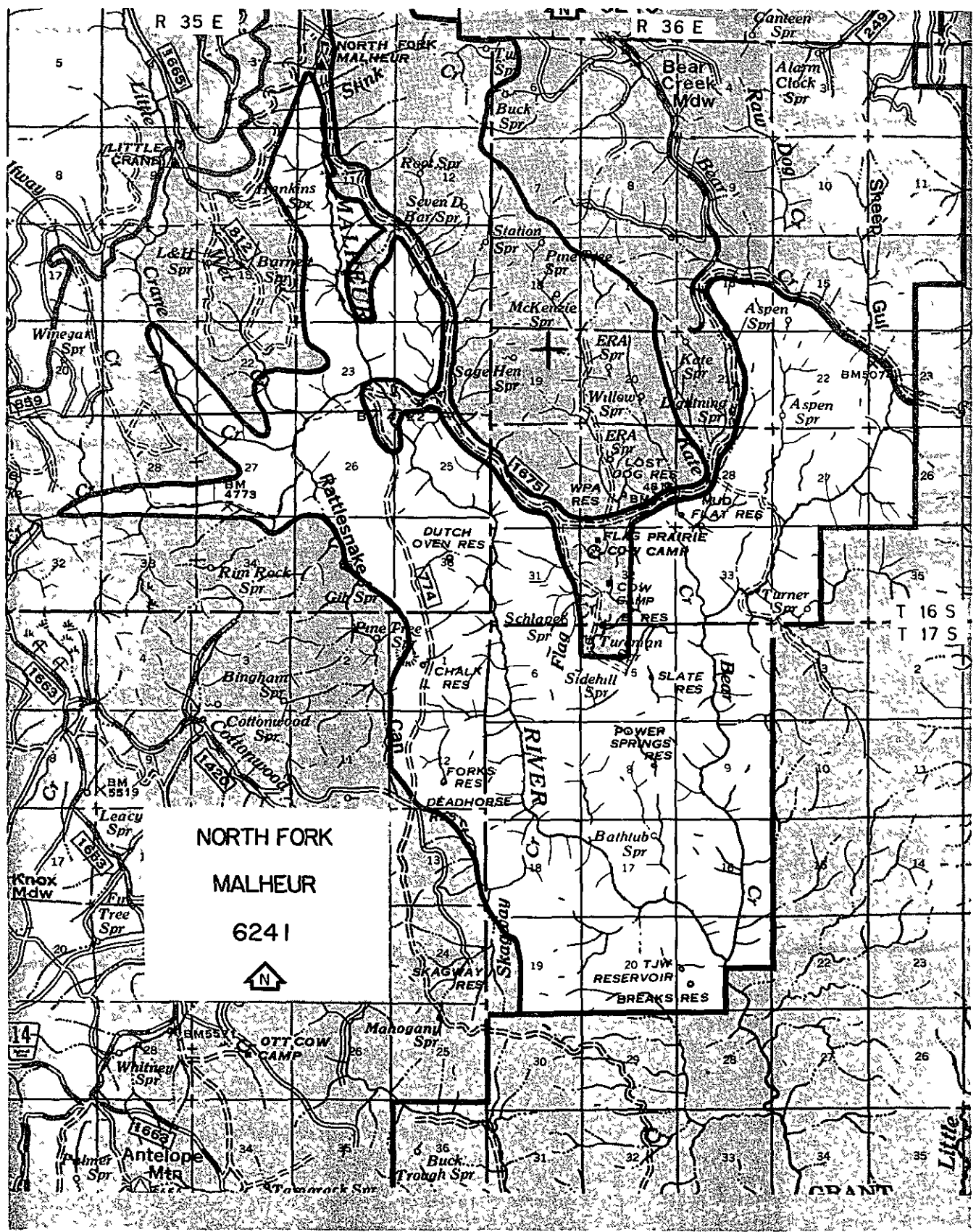


FIGURE C-16



Q. NORTH FORK MALHEUR RIVER -
18,276 Acres (RARE II No. 6241)

1. Description

- a. History This area was inventoried in RARE and enlarged during the RARE II inventory Under the Silvies-Malheur Planning Unit Environmental Impact Statement and the RARE II Environmental Impact Statement, the area has been managed for nonwilderness uses.
- b. Location and Access The area is located on the southern boundary of the Malheur National Forest in the southeast corner (T 16 S., R. 35 E , T. 16 S., R. 36 E , T. 17 S., R. 35 E , T. 17 S., R 36 E., of the Willamette Meridian). Access is by secondary Forest roads on the northern and western edges and trails on the east and south.
- c. Geography and Topography The area consists of steep, rugged river canyons and basalt rimrocks with plateaus above the rivers. The canyons are 500-800 feet deep. See Figure C-16.
- d. Geology and Soils Soils are gravelly, cobbly loams with much surface fragment material. Soils are excessively drained and moderately permeable Derivatives are weathered basalt and andesite The erosion hazard is high on the steep canyon slopes, but low on the flat, southeast portion of the area. Annual average precipitation of the area is about 14 inches with most of the water yield contributing to Beulah Reservoir, located 12 miles southeast. The entire area is covered with Miocene-age volcanic-flow rocks.
- e. Vegetation This area is 43 percent forested. Of these acres, about 1,200 meet the Pacific Northwest Region's definition of old growth Ponderosa pine is scattered throughout the canyon bottoms in stringers and patches. Intervening areas are sagebrush/juniper/mahogany complexes Grasslands are dominant on the top plateaus
- f. Current Uses Hunting, fishing, backpacking, horseback riding, photography, picnicking, and nature study are all recreational uses of this area, with hunting and fishing predominant (See Table C-2.) The hiking aspect of the fishing use is an important part of that experience The proposed Pacific Crest-to-Desert Trail follows the North Fork Malheur River through the heart of this area.
- The area provides year-long elk range, spring-summer-fall deer range, and summer range for antelope It also provides habitat for coyote, bear, small animals, and birds. Inland native trout and bull trout are abundant in the river and tributaries.
- The major attractions of the area are North Fork Malheur River and the rugged canyon lands along the river
- The canyons are very crooked and long views of the river are rare. Each bend in the river brings another scene into view which, while similar to preceding views, shows new microenvironments and diverse canyon scenes

2. Wilderness

Capability

- a. Manageability and Boundaries Boundaries are not readily manageable against motor vehicle entry. There is an opportunity to move the boundaries to the rims of the river canyons. This would eliminate much of the human impact and greatly reduce intrusion of outside influences. It would also reduce the size of the area by 12,865 acres.
- b. Natural Integrity Human impacts are readily visible in the form of fences, stockwater developments, campsites, livestock concentration areas, unimproved roads, and sagebrush control.
- All ecosystems are intact. However, fire suppression has encouraged encroachment of sage and juniper in the grasslands. Under natural conditions, low intensity wildfires would have selectively maintained the grasslands.
- c. Naturalness The canyon area appears very natural to users. The effects of fire exclusion are too subtle to be noticed by most users.
- d. Opportunity for Solitude The canyons provide very effective topographic screening and provide a high degree of solitude, but the plateaus have low opportunity for solitude.
- e. Primitive Recreation and Challenge Primitive recreation opportunities include backpacking and cross-country travel. The area is large enough to provide a Primitive experience. Climbing out of the canyons during cross-country travel would provide a challenging experience.
- f. Special Features No Threatened or Endangered plant or animal species are known to exist in this area. There is one Sensitive plant species located in this area.
- The southern portion of this area was previously included in the Paiute Indian Reservation. The river through the area provided a migration route between summer and winter encampments; however, there are no known cultural sites within the area.

3. Availability for Wilderness

- a. Resource Potentials This area currently provides roaded modified, roaded natural, semiprimitive motorized, and semiprimitive nonmotorized recreation opportunities (See Table C-3.)
- There are 6,800 acres of forested land tentatively suitable for timber management activities. These trees are growing in multistoried stands of predominantly ponderosa pine. The overstories average 140 years old and the understories average 75 years old. There is a standing inventory of 65.89 million board feet (11.52 million cubic feet). With the use of intensive timber management techniques, 326 thousand cubic feet (1,865 thousand board feet) would be contributed to the annual allowable sale quantity in the first decade. The long-term sustained yield capacity from this area would be 388 thousand cubic feet per year.
- There is no known locatable mineral potential and no mining claims. The U.S. Geological Survey considers the southern half of the area to have potential for oil and gas but no potential for geothermal resources. There are 12 sections

covered by oil and gas leases and 19 sections of acquired land on which the mineral rights are reserved until 1988
The area is included in 3 grazing allotments and provides approximately 650 Animal Unit Months per year

b Management Considerations

The western Spruce budworm is probably present in the Douglas-fir and white fir
Extent of infestation is not known. The Douglas-fir is infected with dwarf-mistletoe to varying degrees, and western pine beetle can be found in old-growth ponderosa pine.

There are no non-Federal lands within this area Bureau of Land Management, State of Oregon, and private lands are adjacent to the Forest boundary on the southern end of this area There are two administrative withdrawals and two rights-of-way

4. Wilderness Evaluation

The existing Strawberry Mountain Wilderness is 15 miles northwest, Monument Rock Wilderness is 9 miles northeast, Black Canyon Wilderness is 64 miles north, and North Fork John Day Wilderness is 62 miles northwest This area provides a unique canyon experience at lower elevations

Bend or Ontario, Oregon are the nearest minor population centers (110-150 miles); Portland, Oregon or Boise, Idaho, are the nearest major population centers (300-180 miles)

In the 1979 RARE II study, there was 149 comments favoring wilderness, 2,584 favoring further study status, and 3,407 opposed to wilderness designation

In the most recent public involvement activity for Forest planning, this area was among those receiving a moderate level of comments. These comments showed a decided lack of consensus with a ratio of 1.6 comments opposed to wilderness for every comment in favor In both categories of response, however, there was strong support for protection of the river and canyons and an emphasis on the importance of fish and wildlife habitat within the area

There have been suggestions to include this area with the Flag Creek Roadless Area and the Monument Rock Wilderness to the northeast as a wilderness "complex "

5. Environmental Consequence

Table C-20 displays the various management area assignments for this area by alternative

In all alternatives 3,577 acres are managed to be within the Wild and Scenic River management area, in accordance with The Omnibus Oregon Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1988 which declared the North Fork of the Malheur River to be a part of the Wild and Scenic River System

The following discussion pertains to those acres outside the river corridor

a Vegetation/Trees

Significant changes in tree sizes, stand density, and composition will occur in all alternatives except Alternative C-Modified, as trees are harvested and thinned. Timber harvest is scheduled for suitable forested land on the plateau in all alternatives except Alternative C-Modified Where timber harvests and stocking levels occur, tree vigor will increase reducing the risk of loss to insects and diseases. Acres affected by timber harvest vary between alternatives.

- b. Vegetation/Grass and Shrubs In all alternatives except Alternative C-Modified, the greatest change in forage for livestock and wildlife will occur within forested areas. Seeding of introduced grass species will provide higher quality and quantity of palatable plants and change the present plant composition. Native grasses and forbs will increase naturally as tree canopies are opened and thinning occurs in the understory
- In Alternative C-Modified, no change is expected in the amounts and kinds of grasses, forbs, and shrubs existing now
- c. Wilderness In Alternatives A, F, I, and NC, future wilderness consideration would remain a possibility until the end of the first decade on 4,906 to 7,616 acres, compared to 18,276 acres in Alternative C-Modified. Wilderness consideration would be foregone in Alternative B-Modified
- d. Recreation The recreational opportunity would vary from roaded modified in Alternative B-Modified, to semiprimitive nonmotorized in all other alternatives. Recreation experiences would involve increased vehicle use in Alternative B-Modified.
- In a semiprimitive nonmotorized setting, users would experience a natural setting without motorized intrusion within the canyon walls. More trails would be constructed and consideration given to the proposed Pacific Crest-to-Desert Trail. The primary recreation uses of fishing, horseback riding, hiking, and hunting would remain unchanged
- Within semiprimitive motorized and roaded modified settings, users would see and hear off-road vehicles within the canyon. The trail along the river would provide a challenge to off-road cyclists seeking such experience in a vast canyon area
- In a roaded modified recreation opportunity, increased vehicle use and sounds on access roads constructed along the canyon rims or river benches would also occur.
- e. Scenery The scenic views of a vast, unspoiled canyon, as seen from the river bottom, would be retained in all alternatives except Alternative B-Modified. Above the canyon rim, the scenic variety of open slopes to forested benches would be least affected by Alternative C-Modified, greater by Alternative A, and affected to an even greater degree by the other alternatives. The greatest affect on scenery would be in Alternative B-Modified, which would change the forest appearance within the canyon as well as the benches above the river. Alternatives A, F, I, and NC would change the forest appearance above the canyon rims and would leave the area as seen from the bottom of the river unchanged.
- f. Wildlife Effects on old growth and snags would increase proportionately to the acres of timber harvested within each alternative. Alternative C-Modified, with no acres harvested, would have the least effect on these resources. Management standards would adequately protect key habitats of all wildlife under all alternatives. Old growth would be retained on a minimum of 300 acres in most alternatives to meet minimum requirements. Elk winter range covers about 90 percent of the area. In alternatives allowing timber harvest (Alternatives A, B-Modified, F, I, and NC), hiding and thermal cover are decreased while forage is increased.

- g Water, Riparian, Fisheries North Fork Malheur River, Bear Creek, and Crane Creek are the major streams which support trout and a riparian zone in addition to numerous small meadows. Management standards would adequately protect these resources in all alternatives Increased accessibility and use as a result of timber harvest and road construction would be greatest in those alternatives with the highest timber activity
- h Cultural Resources The alternatives with the most development present the greatest risk of inadvertent damage to the resource Because of the greater activity, they also present the greatest opportunity for discovery of resources There is no discernible difference between alternatives when considering existing laws, regulations, and management standards which specifically protect cultural resources
- i. Soils Alternatives A, B-Modified, F, I, and NC present the greatest risk of inadvertent damage to the soils as well as acceptable amounts of compaction as a result of harvest activities. All of the alternatives adequately protect the resource through application of management standards



TABLE C-20

NORTH FORK MALHEUR RIVER MANAGEMENT BY ALTERNATIVE
Acres)

Management Area	NC ^{1/}	Alternatives				
		A	B-Mod	C-Mod	F	I-Preferred
1 General Forest	N/A	2,956	4,140		2,281	2,281
2 Rangeland		5,035	7,690		217	217
3. Riparian Areas		482	773		648	648
4A Big-Game Winter Range					8,524	7,113
4B Big-Game Winter Range Enhancement						
5. Bald Eagle Winter Roost						
6A. Strawberry Mountain Wilderness						
6B Monument Rock Wilderness						
6C Pine Creek						
7 Scenic Area						
8 Special Interest Area						
9. Research Natural Area						
10 Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized	N/A	5,139		14,865		2,670 ^{2/}
11. Semi-Primitive Motorized					1,495	
12. Developed Recreation						
13 Old Growth	N/A	300	600		300	600
14. Visual Corridors			848		433	433
15. Unit Plan Wildlife Emphasis Areas						
16. Minimum Level Management		953	814		967	903
17 Byram Gulch Municipal Supply Watershed						
18. Long Creek Municipal Supply Watershed						
19 Administrative Sites						
20 Wildlife Emphasis Areas with Scheduled Harvest						
21 Wildlife Emphasis Area Non-Scheduled Harvest						
22 Wild and Scenic River	N/A	3,411	3,411	3,411	3,411	3,411
TOTAL ACRES	N/A	18,276	18,276	18,276	18,276	18,276

^{1/}The Timber Management Plan, upon which the No Change Alternative is based, was developed in 1979. The plan was not an integrated plan and, consequently, did not address all resource uses and outputs in an integrated manner. As a result, these acreages are not available.

^{2/}This area will be renamed Bear Creek Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized area.